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Window

Mark Bialy

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THE ROCHESTER INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY

WINDOW

A THESIS SUBMITTED TO
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OF THE
COLLEGE OF FINE AND APPLIED ARTS
IN CANDIDACY FOR THE DEGREE OF
MASTER OF FINE ARTS

BY

MARK GEORGE BIALY

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R. H. Johnston, Dean

6923738

THESIS COMMITTEE

Chief Advisor: Fredrick R. Meyer, M.F.A.

Associate Advisor: Wayne F. Williams, M.F.A.

Associate Advisor: David Dickinson, M.F.A.

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WINDOW

It has come to that point, within my work, that a written adjunct must be given to my paintings. I hope it to be a form of reasoning that will, in its own way, assist the reader in determining a basis for my images; and nothing more. While I do not begrudge the necessity of writing this piece, I do not, on the other hand, believe all that is written on the creative process to be all that true. Nor do I believe that a post facto self-analysis of a painting is anything but a gradual slide into either defensiveness or arrogant self-justification.

That is neither a lament, nor a celebration of this task, but the preliminary step towards a logical narrative. I have no idea where the subsequent pages will lead, but I do hope to limit their scope to those ideas which would seem to be the most descriptive of my work.

This thesis will be divided into two interacting portions. In the first, I will describe my notions towards my materials, and the methods used in their visual assembly. By giving a simple chronological analysis of these elements used, I would hope to reconstruct the general order of thoughts which leads to the completed painting. The second portion would be a collection of quotes which I feel an

affinity for. Some do approximate my own ideas, and others have had their particular value in being those ephemeral thoughts which have had meaning at a particular time. Yet these retain their importance by having surfaced sometime during the existence of this project, and since receded.

Whites and blacks, in their pure form, have no presence on a completed painting. Both are nondescriptive in their appearance and tend to wreak visual havoc within a painting. It is a shared peculiarity of both that they maintain an inordinate dominance over a painting while they may physically occupy only a small area.

Black is either a void or projection, depending upon the surrounding color combination. This roots in its color-light absorbant qualities which fluctuate, becoming an emitted mass or a receding visual hole. Within an area of color variety, it is noticeable from the onset, and is undesirable. It tends to lead the eye away from the color interplay and becomes punctuation; a stopping point. Within the image it freezes eyesight to its location, preventing enjoyment of the tension and movement of the whole image. It is due to the uncertainty of atmospheric perspective that black is an unresolvable entity, and is excised from the visual palette.

White seems to be the more simple of the two in that it does not become plural in its form of distraction: white does not have the ability to visually recede as does black. Its singular quality of interference, in this manner, is its tendency to appear as a mass above its surrounding color constituents. Visually, white will lift itself above its surroundings, allowing it to be perceived as a separate plane or segment. This ability to visually float creates a tension that overpowers the subtle interactions of the color variants that accompany it. White will also allow a too strong light source to be admitted onto the surface of the painting. It is the extreme light absorbency of this particular base which causes a fracture of the visual surface. A decision has to be made as to which power will dominate a painting, while also contributing to a harmony of the whole. Clearly, the white is too powerful to be allowed.

Both black and white would negate the subtleties of color, and are, in my view, destructive of a color harmony.

My palette is limited to those colors which seem to be the most personally expressive. Specifically I mean those primaries and variants that exist from red-orange through green-yellow on the color wheel. I eliminate the yellow primary and those oranges which are closest to it, as too demanding of light and visual volume. In some ways they approximate the distractions of white, imposing themselves in a more vigorous fashion than is acceptable.

Earth colors are dispensed with as too akin to the visually absorbent nature of black. They are, in their own way, too solid and static for the intentions of my palette.

Essentially, there is more than enough latitude with the red, blue, and green limitation.

Color usage is based upon the primaries, or close variants, as anchors within the image. Further visual development utilizes variants of these anchors or majors, as those constituents which flesh-out the skeletal painting (the minors).

The interplay of both major and minor colors would assume an order which either compliments the form of the abstraction, or runs in a contrary manner to it. The actual use and result is, of course, dependent on the pictorial intent. Interpretation is here, also, dependent on visual intellect and aspiration. Specific use or outcome of color is impossible to predict, and I do not pretend to visual prophecy. Be it sufficient to say that color must be resolved by form, in that color and its inherent light values become the tool of form, and form definition. But conversely, form becomes the servant of color and light. It is within this cyclical premise that I both propose and execute my paintings.

Color, when discussed as a formless entity, has its recognizable limitations, as well as its accepted visual potential. Reason and calculation must, however, be limited, severing whatever personal bonds are imposed. Once color is

applied in its prescribed area, it has to be allowed a free reign. Whatever the particular interaction that arises from the positioning of certain colors, the result should be spontaneous.

It is usually found that people will shy away from confronting a painting if it is to be dealt with on the terms that governed its creation. Far easier to cover the work with verbal analysis, conjecture, or legend, making it more comfortable to be with.

I have no idea where most of my images come from. True, they have a relationship to architecture and geometry, but I cannot recall ever having seen those particular shapes outside of my paintings. I do not attach any complex meaning to any of these pictorials, preferring a title which is visually descriptive. I only want the assembly of the pieces to have an overall effect.

I seek a visual clarity with the use of abstraction, specifically simple geometric assemblies. I find that this form allows me a certain liberty in utilizing flat areas of color. There is the ability to become complex with light while being simple with form.

While drawn lines are not actually present in any painting, linear perspective is sometimes used in piecing the forms. Atmospheric perspective is, however, the main

method of space definition. Beyond this I do not exercise any great control over the particular forms or their placement.

Visual activity takes place within the painted picture and further within the whole framed composition. There is the colored abstraction, the geometric hard-edged piece, which floats behind its plastic sheet. Subordinate to this is the series of shadows created by the painted mass, which blocks the passage of light into the interior of the physical structure. This creates a depth to the pictorial, as it is, obviously, causing its own shadow, setting the image off from the wall. Surrounding this is the diffused shadow of the frame structure, the grey-tinted light which diffuses through the sides, causing a halo border. Both are supportive of each other as they combine to create an illusion of a third dimension, while retaining their own autonomy.

In this situation, light is reinforced within its own sectors, by an interplay of opposites. Light will strike the pictorial and illuminate it as the various colors dictate. While this occurs, the area behind the painted image is deprived of light, thus causing the shadow, which accentuates the light qualities of the pictorial. There is the immediate contrast of these two powers. Following this would be the softer contrasts of the frame-shadow, plus the light activities on the wall itself, depending upon wall color and texture.

A relationship is formed with the wall that the painting hangs from. This begins through the use of shadows and lights, continuing now by way of the frame structure.

It is not so much a frame, but rather a spacer that lifts the painting off of the wall. Constructed of a transparent grey-tinted plastic, the spacer is actually four thin rectangular strips, affixed to the extreme border of the painted sheet, maintained in place by minimal steel fastening clips. However the structure is sufficient to develop an affinity to the wall it rests on. A comparison of the two would identify both as flat planes, running perpendicular to each other. Both are visible forms with sufficient intrinsic power to clearly define their own areas.

Atop the spacer is the clear plastic sheet which contains the painting on its inside surface. This is the parallel which accepts the spacer, that is, in turn, joining itself to the wall. There is a development that progresses from the wall outward. The wall is opaque, solid in its structure, running into the spacer that is semi-transparent, meeting, finally, with the clear form surrounding the painting. Though each segment is sharply delineated, the feeling of a diffusion is present, to culminate the mass of the pictorial.

The window is the constructed piece; the total of color, plastic and steel. A window is to be looked at, and through, allowing something to be seen within, reflecting back something slightly different. Light is absorbed and emitted. Color is broadcast, opening the surface, yet it also obscures.

It is not possible to fully see through the window, nor can the window be opened for better view. It is a visual object.

Verse XVI

The finite Atom infinite that forms thy circle's
centre-dot,
So full-sufficient for itself, for other selves
existing not,

Verse XVII

Finds the world mighty as 'tis small; yet must be
fought the unequal fray;
A myriad giants here; and there a pinch of dust, a
clod of clay.

Verse XVIII

Yes! maugre¹ all thy dreams of peace still must the
fight unfair be fought;
Where thou mayst learn the noblest lore, to know
that all we know is nought.

Verse XIX

True to thy Nature, to Thy self, Fame and Disfame
nor hope nor fear:
Enough to thee the small still voice aye thund'ering
in thine inner Ear.

Sir Richard Francis Burton
"The Kasidah of Haji Abdu
El-Yezdi"
(Ninth Part)

¹Maugre: to defy or oppose, to show ill-will to.

Painting with all its technicalities, difficulties and peculiar ends, is nothing but a noble and expressive language, invaluable as the vehicle of thought, but by itself nothing.

Ruskin
"True and Beautiful"

The great artists of the world are never Puritans, and seldom even ordinarily respectable.

H.L. Mencken
"Prejudices" (First Series)

Nine times out of ten, in the arts as in life, there is actually no truth to be discovered; there is only error to be explored.

Mencken
"Prejudices" (Third Series)

Take calculated risks, that is quite different from being rash.

George S. Patton

A large part of what has been written about painting, it is fair to say, has been written almost as if paintings were works in black and white.

Allen Pattillo
(Art Historian)

Art never expresses anything but itself.

Oscar Wilde
"The Decay of Lying"

Art should never try to be popular.

Wilde
"The Soul of Man Under Socialism"

Nothing can come out of an artist that is not in the man.

H.L. Mencken
"Prejudices"

What has reasoning to do with the art of painting?.....To generalize is to be an idiot.

William Blake

Aesthetics are to me, what ornithology is for the birds.

Barnett Newman
"Painters Painting"

Painting is the intermediate somewhat between a thought and a thing.

S.T. Coleridge
"Table Talk"

All human error is impatience, a premature renunciation of method, a delusive pinning down of a delusion.

Franz Kafka
"Letters"

There are two cardinal sins from which all others spring: impatience and laziness.

Kafka

Mirrors should reflect a little before throwing back images.

Jean Cocteau
"Des Beaux Arts"

Good painting is like good cooking: it can be tasted, but not explained.

Vlaminck
"On Painting"

Art is a shoemaker that lives around the corner from me.

Tom Insalaco
(Painter)

With concrete Art, which aims at harmony through geometry and construction, contemporary pictorial has enlarged and greatly enriched the domain whose boundaries were traced by Piet Mondrian. Its basic premise is that the artist's authentic material is absolute, clearly defined form and that his task is to treat the picture as an autonomous field, from which he eliminates all disturbing elements in order to achieve a harmony which is the ultimate and self-sufficient formula of the spirit and hence a visual equivalent of the balance achieved by man in the universe. Despite its greater formal richness, the painting is always conceived as an absolute, as the harmonic end formula in which all personal emotions have been reduced to silence and repose. In the geometrical architecture of the painting, human existence and its expression give way to pure harmony and its formal order. This is the most radical position held by abstract painting.

Werner Haftmann
"Painting in the Twentieth
Century"

Concrete art conceives of the picture as a distillation, an harmonic end formula which transcends all natural or artificial formal or psychic tensions, a product of keen intelligence and clear applications of the laws governing the pictorial elements.

Haftmann
"Painting in the Twentieth
Century"

...the expanded realm of the artistic may come into conflict with that of the pictorial; and when this occurs the former must give way. But even apart from this particular complication, the expansion of the realm of the pictorial is at best a mixed blessing for a modernist painter: because at the same time that the spectator may have gained the ability to see...a potential painting, he may have also acquired the tendency to regard a modernist painting of the highest quality as nothing more than a length of color...That is, because all sorts of large and small items that used to belong entirely to the realm of the arbitrary and the visually meaningless may now be experienced pictorially or in meaningful relation to the pictorial, the risk is greatly increased that first-rate modernist paintings will appear arbitrary and visually meaningless. It is in this sense above all that modernist painting presents unique difficulties to the beholder.

Michael Fried
"Three American Painters"

Despite its rejection both of representation and traditional tactile illusionism, and paradoxically, because of its concern with problems intrinsic to itself, modernist painting today is perhaps more desperately involved with aspects of its visual environment than painting has ever been.

Fried
"Three American Painters"

Abstraction...an essential content, and rendering that content visible is what the artist is concerned with...depicting the universal harmony, the laws that govern our universe. These forces are only partially visible in perceptible nature; the artist's intuition can discern them in their purity and reveal them to others. For the depiction of this universal content, only abstract pictorial means can be used: "If indeed the appropriate elaboration of the expressive means and

their use--that is, composition--is the only pure expression of art, then the means of expression are to be in complete conformity with what they have to express. If they are to be the direct expression of the universal, they cannot be other than universal, that is to say, abstract" (Mondrian-De Stijl, 1, 5).

Hans L.C. Jaffe'
(Mondrian)

Piety in art-poetry in art-Puseyism² in art-
let us be careful how be confound them.

Anna Jameson
"Memoirs and Essays:
The House of Titian"

²Puseyism: Less courteous manner of referring to that portion of the "Oxford Movement, led by Dr. E.B. Pusey, which championed a Roman Catholic revival in the Church of England, (circa 1833).

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- Haftmann, Werner. Painting in the Twentieth Century. New York: Praeger, 1972.

ILLUSTRATIONS

- Number 1: Window Series # 31/3 Vaults receding.
(1/8/76)
- " 2: " " # 32/Tryptich.
(1/29/76)
- " 3: " " # 33/Landscape.
(2/11/76)
- " 4: " " # 34/2 Cubes decending.
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- " 5: " " # 36/Flat planes.
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